

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002759

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: SPECIAL ADVISOR BUGAJE HOLDS HIGH EXPECTAQTIONS FOR THE PLANNED ABUJA CONFERENCE

REF: A. NAIROBI 6602

B. CAIRO 6777

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary: During a brief October 22 meeting, Presidential Special Advisor Usman Bugaje said the November 12-17 conference on Sudan was on track. He described the "3-in-1" conference where the Southern and Northern groups would first meet separately, then join in an all parties session. He contended the Nigerians were not pushing a substantive agenda except that they opposed Southern secession. Abuja sought only to provide a forum where the Sudanese could find their own way, he stated. This procedural-substantive dichotomy may work in the abstract but in practice the line is blurred. The composition of invitees will influence the substantive agenda. While the smaller parties and factions may welcome this wider tent, the perennial antagonists - Bashir and Garang -- might experience a rare moment of agreement. Both probably will not relish sharing space around a negotiating table they now monopolize. Despite these potential sticking points, we should encourage the Nigerians in their effort. However, gauging the emanations from Cairo and Nairobi, Bugaje may be underestimating the difficulties inherent in the Nigerian approach. End summary.

¶12. (C) During an October 23 meeting with PolCouns and Poloff, Dr. Usman Bugaje stated the November 12-17 conference was on track. Bugaje, Abuja's point man on Sudan, said he was traveling to London that very evening. In London he would meet with non-SPLA Southern opposition members October 23 in addition to seeing the Snyder/Oakley team October 24. Bugaje, optimistic that Nigeria could push the Sudanese process forward, outlined Abuja's "3-in-1" conference scenario.

¶13. (C) Bugaje's formulation differed from what NSA Mohammed told us most recently. Bugaje envisioned a meeting of all Southern opposition groups, a separate session of all Northern parties (including the government's party) and a third meeting of all who participated in the first two confabulations. (Conversely, Mohammed told us the second meeting would convene all the opposition groups. We do not know if Mohammed misspoke or if there is a disconnect among the Nigerians.)

¶14. (C) Stressing that this formula was promising because it promoted inclusivity, Bugaje characterized both the IGAD process and Egyptian-Libyan Initiative (ELI) as inert. IGAD had languished for nearly eight years with a controversial document - the Declaration of Principles -- as its only noted accomplishment, he declared. Additionally he cited IGAD as structurally flawed because it only involved the SPLM and the Bashir Government. Bugaje contended other Southern armed groups also controlled territory. Although Garang's faction was the largest, marginalizing the other groups would prove inimical. They ultimately would be disruptive in order to force a place at the table. Bugaje also explained that Southern political party leaders have threatened to take up arms unless they were included in the process. Overall, other Southern groupings were tired of Garang's delaying tactics. Garang was footdragging because he was more comfortable with the status quo than with the political uncertainty that progress toward peace might sow.

¶15. (C) Bugaje characterized the ELI as stillborn, claiming the partnership between Cairo and Tripoli could not advance the peace process because the Cairo-Tripoli bilateral relationship was marked more by contention than concord.

¶16. (C) The Nigerian Special Advisor predicted that the Nigerian approach could cure the faults of the two other initiatives. By inviting all credible Sudanese parties, including the Southern political organizations, the Nigerian

approach minimized the chance of minor parties uniting to roll a boulder in the road because they were excluded from peace talks. Second, the Abuja conference would not impose a solution; it simply provided a conducive venue. Nigeria neither endorsed nor opposed the substantive agendas of the two other initiatives, he offered. Abuja will let the Sudanese decide; they can adhere to the DOP, the ELI formula or choose a third stream, asserted Bugaje. Nigeria's only anathema was partition. Given its own history of destructive civil war, Nigeria would not "preside" over the dismantling of another state, Bugaje stressed. (Comment: While Bugaje 's statement was retrospective, we cannot but feel that Nigeria's current ethno-religious maelstrom figures in Abuja's squeamishness about secession as well. End comment.)

17. (C) When asked whether Garang, whose personality houses vast deposits of megalomania, accepted such a conference arrangement that would seem to dilute his negotiating position in the South and within the NDA. Bugaje, contended that "sufficient pressure" was being placed on Garang to make him amenable. However, Bugaje admitted that Nigeria must delicately calibrate the numerical representation of the other Southern parties to prevent them from acquiring a voice exceeding their power and importance on the ground.

18. (C) Bugaje was also certain that Bashir would send high level negotiators and that Northern elements of the NDA would be well represented. When asked about the logic of an all-northern meeting, Bugaje was momentarily nonplused. He then declared that the conferences were geographically structured to reflect political realities. Despite their differences, the Northerners share a greater commonality of interests notwithstanding the North/South makeup of the NDA.

19. (C) Comment: Bugaje tried to outline a simple straightforward approach. His presentation was typical of the Nigerian stratagem toward conflict resolution -- put the parties in a room and let them hash it out; intervening only to prevent a stalemate. Nigeria's intrinsic importance and Obasanjo's personal stature suggest Nigerian efforts to gather the parties could possibly energize the peace process. Because of these attributes, we should encourage the Nigerians toward a constructive role. However as the preparations for the conference unfold, we must watch closely that the formulation does not have the unintended consequences of compounding Garang's recalcitrance and escalating the North-South divide, testing the stability of the NDA in the process.

Andrews